

Gender & Media awards

By Arthur Okwemba

Two years ago, when the Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS) found glaring gaps in the representation of women in the media, it never occurred to the study's sponsors that the findings would be an impetus for positive change.

On Sunday night, the Southern African Gender and Media Awards were presented for the first time by Gender Links and the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), the two organisations behind the GMBS. The awards ceremony was the highlight of the first day of the Gender and Media Summit, taking place in Johannesburg until 14 September. At the summit, there is one resounding and refreshing consensus: reporting of gender issues in the media is improving across southern Africa.

Five journalists were honoured for work that highlighted gender issues in a way that stirs debate and effects change. The judges looked for stories that had an impact and with which readers and viewers could identify. They also wanted stories which challenged the readers (or listeners) and offered solutions. The winners received cash prizes and the opportunity to work for three months in a newsroom in southern Africa.

The awards, sponsored by Gender Links and MISA, also illustrate an increase in gender sensitivity in media stories since the GMBS was conducted in 2002. The awards will be given every two years and will be used to showcase good gender coverage in the regional media. Colleen Lowe-Morna, executive director of Gender Links, said: "With the awards, we want to affirm that very positive developments have taken place in the reportage of gender issues in the southern African media since the GMBS."

The four judges said the 76 entries in the five categories demonstrate outstanding quality in gender reporting. Inter-Press Service Africa regional director and chair of the judges' panel, Farai Samhungu, described the entries as "a resounding testimony to the progress that is being made in southern Africa towards presenting gender issues in ways that spark debate and make more professional, robust journalism".

"At first the judges feared that they would have to struggle to find a good story. But they were pleasantly surprised at the quality, which made their work easier," added Jennifer Mufune, executive: gender and chapter support at MISA

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regional secretariat in Namibia. The awards honour journalists who have demonstrated that gender awareness can positively influence media reporting.

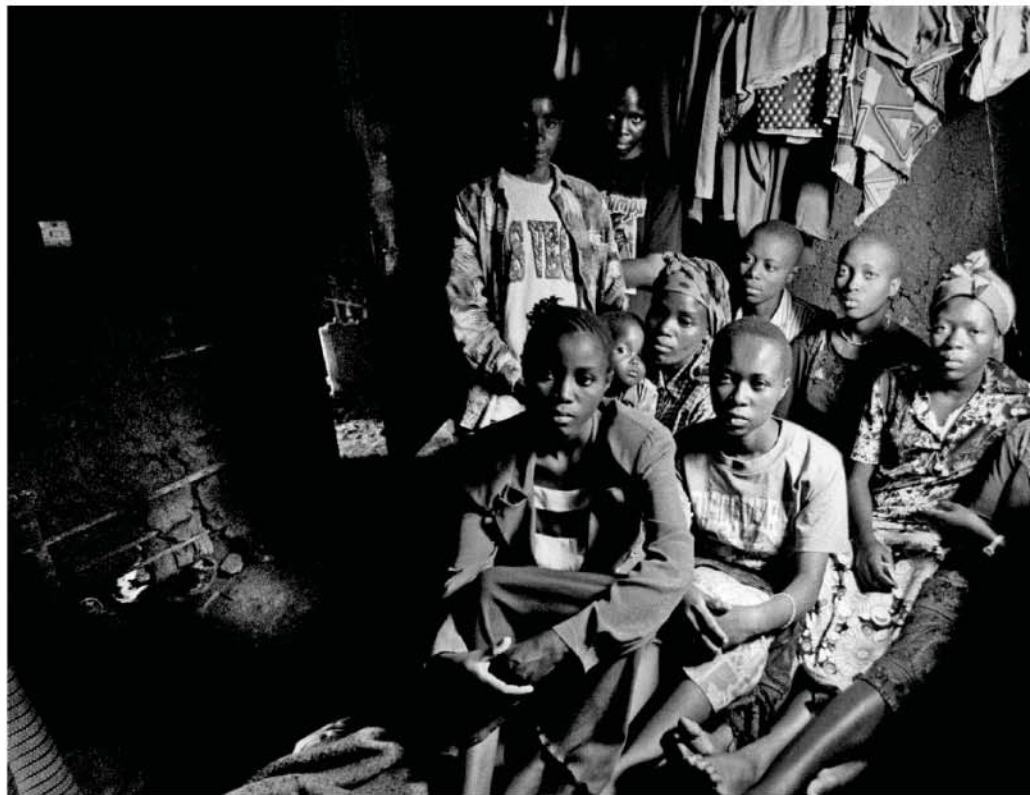
Mufune said securing funding for the prizes was a challenge. Future awards would "confer long-term benefits like offering winners scholarships to pursue masters degrees in Gender and Media", she said.

Finalists were selected from 76 entries in five categories: newspapers and magazines; opinion and commentary; photography; television and radio.

Marie Geraldine Quirin of Mauritius won the first prize in the newspaper and magazine category for her story "These 'misters' that toddlers call 'miss'". The article is about two men running a day care centre. The runner-up in this category was Sarah Taylor of Namibia with her story "An explosive cocktail" on polygamy and HIV and AIDS in Swaziland.

In the Opinion and Commentary category, the first prize went to Everjoice Win of Zimbabwe for the article "Sisters you let us down". The runner-up in this category was Yazed Kamaldien of South Africa for his article "Sister not slave".

A photographic reportage entitled "From the heart of darkness" by Lori Waselchuk of South Africa won the first prize in the photography category. The runner-up prize went to Shamiso Mapure of Zimbabwe for the photograph "Another world is possible".



Joseline (middle, holding baby) and her husband provide shelter for ten teenage girls at their two-bedroom home in Walungu, Eastern DRC. The girls fled their village in fear of being abducted, raped and attacked. All photographs taken by Lori Waselchuk.